

Chairpersons Senator Moore and Representative Abercrombie, Vice-chairs Senator Slossberg and Representative McGee and members of the Human Services Committee, I am MarySue Owens, and I have been an interpreter with the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), formerly the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI) for 28 years. I would like to speak in support of Raised Bill 6941, An Act Concerning State Agency Interpreters.

For many years DORS(CDHI) was the only source for professional interpreting services in CT. Any state agency or private business could contact us and rest assured that they were getting a qualified interpreter. However, under a previous administration, there was considerable effort to dismantle the agency and it endured repeated significant cuts. Additionally, when the Connecticut Association of the Deaf won their suit against the Connecticut Hospital Association and 32 of its acute care facilities for not providing interpreters in emergency situations it resulted in an agreement whereby an oncall system was to be established to meet the need. A Request for Proposal to establish this system was released. The administration refused to allow CDHI to submit a proposal. At that time, Family Services Woodfield in Bridgeport, a well-known and respected community service provider, submitted and won the proposal. They began providing interpreting services in 1995 and continue to do so today. Many interpreters actually work for both agencies. Fortunately for the CT Deaf and Hard of Hearing community there are two respected interpreting service providers.

Raised Bill 6941 will not prevent state agencies from using FSW or other providers but it does expect that the first call be to its sister agency, DORS/CDHI. Our staff of interpreters consist of 40 fully certified and qualified interpreters, most with more than 10 years of experience. We are highly trained in various specialties and have diverse backgrounds and thus can meet a wide range of needs.

As this committee is aware, there is another bill, 6765, An Act Concerning Interpreter Qualifications, that is a necessity because of the fact that DORS/CDHI is no longer the only provider of interpreting services. When a state agency contacts us for services they need not worry if the interpreter is compliant with

state statute as it is a requirement before we are hired and throughout our employ. Our interpreting coordinators assess requests for services and assign the interpreter(s) who are the best and most appropriate fit. They maintain contact with the requestors to assure that services are satisfactory.

Although the attempts to dismantle CDHI have resulted in significant services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing people being lost the Interpreting Unit has been able to survive. I would suggest our survival is due to two important factors, first the skill and experience of our staff and second, our services are the least costly. In these difficult economic times when state agencies are required to trim their budgets, why would they choose to pay more?

I respectfully ask you to support Raised Bill 6941.

Thank you,

MarySue Owens

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